



by
BENJAMIN BRITTEN

MACMILLAN THEATRE
EDWARD JOHNSON BUILDING

DECEMBER 2, 3, 9, 10, 1977

8:00 P.M.

THE OPERA DEPARTMENT

presents

ALBERT HERRING

A Comic Opera in Three Acts*

Libretto freely adapted from a short story
of Guy de Maupassant

by

Eric Crozier

Music by

Benjamin Britten

Conductor

Director

Scenic and Costume Designer

Lighting Designer

Assistant Conductor

Michael Evans

Constance Fisher

Maxine Graham

Ronald Kresky

Derek Bate

Characters of the Opera

December 2, 10

December 3, 9

LADY BILLOWS, an elderly autocrat

Heather Wilberforce

Heather Wilberforce

FLORENCE PIKE, her housekeeper

Julia Heyer

Eleanor Kazdan

MISS WORDSWORTH, Head Teacher
at the Church School

Caralyn Tomlin

Susan Lauher

MR. GEDGE, the Vicar

Rod Campbell

Brian Benn

MR. UPFOLD, the Mayor

Allan Marter

Barry Stilwell

SUPERINTENDENT BUDD

Joel Katz

Christopher Cameron

SID, a butcher's shop-hand

Blair House

Gino Quilico

ALBERT HERRING, from the
greengrocer's

Stephen Young

Mark DuBois

NANCY, from the bakery

Deborah Milsom

Deborah Milsom

MRS. HERRING, Albert's mother

Jill Pert

Jill Pert

EMMIE

Sandra Gavinchuk

Sandra Gavinchuk

CIS

Gail Hakala

Gail Hakala

HARRY

Matthew Medland+

Ihor Sywanyk+

} village children

There will be two intermissions

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+Members of the Canadian Children's Opera Chorus

THE STORY

The action of the opera takes place at Loxford, a small market-town in East Suffolk, in 1900.

ACT I, SCENE I - Morning-room of Lady Billows' house, April 10th.

As Lady Billows shouts orders from upstairs, Florence, her dour housekeeper prepares for the arrival of the committee which will choose a May Queen for the forthcoming May Day Celebrations. The bland and ineffectual Vicar, the twittering schoolmistress, the pompous Mayor and the ponderous Superintendent of Police arrive with recommendations, on behalf of suitable candidates. They are well aware that Florence has assembled all possible gossip; only the most chaste of virgins will be considered. Lady Billows is outraged that not one of the suggested candidates is without scandal. The Superintendent saves the situation by proposing that Albert Herring, an awkward innocent greengrocer's boy be crowned as May King. First met by uniform opposition, this proposal is unanimously accepted during a fugal ensemble.

ACT I, SCENE II - Greengrocer's shop, the same morning.

This scene introduces Albert, laughed at by the village children and pitied with amusement by Sid and Nancy, two mischievous amorous young friends. He tries to express his dreams and unknown desires, but is interrupted first by a customer and then by the deputation of the May Day Committee. It proclaims Albert as King of the May in recognition of his virtue and simplicity. Albert's streak of rebellion shows in a subsequent quarrel with his mother, which he loses. He is sent to his room to the delight of the children who renew their taunts.

ACT II, SCENE I - Garden of the Rectory, May 1st.

The May Day Celebration. Sid and Nancy have 'laced' Albert's lemonade with rum. The party from the church arrives and Committee members offer speeches and presents. These range from Lady Billows' purse of otterskin (with 25 sovereigns inside) to Miss Wordsworth's "Fox's Book of Martyrs". Following the Vicar's toast Albert drinks to Lady Billows and promptly gets hiccups. He is cured by drinking lemonade from the wrong side of the glass and the curtain falls to a general roar and babble from the whole ensemble as the feast begins.

ACT II, SCENE II - Greengrocer's shop, that night.

Albert, neither quite sober nor quite drunk, returns home from the party and in a long solo *scena* reflects on the food, the lemonade, the way Nancy looked at him...His thoughts are interrupted as he accidentally hears Sid and Nancy discussing his problems in the street outside. A love duet follows. After the lovers exit, Albert's rage at his own virtue grows; and he launches into a devastatingly bitter soliloquy. He notes his prize money which he had forgotten, hesitates, then makes up his mind and slips out into the night to meet Vice for the first time. Mrs. Herring arrives home and, believing Albert asleep, goes to bed.

ACT III - Greengrocer's shop, the next afternoon.

The entire neighbourhood is engaged in a man-hunt for the missing Albert. Nancy consoles Mrs. Herring who is grieving to the full. After some false alarms, the discovery of the battered remains of the orange blossom wreath from Albert's coronation hat confirms his death and the musical climax of the opera; a Threnody, is sung—a serious and deeply moving ostinato with an individual verse for each of the characters. At this point a dishevelled Albert arrives. Mourning changes to a concerted attack upon his character. He retaliates with new-found confidence, and, to the shock of all present, with a virtuosity proportionate to his loss of virtue, turns on his mother and Lady Billows. The late Committee stalks out, Mrs. Herring is sent gently but firmly off and Albert is truly emancipated.

BENJAMIN BRITTEN AND OPERA

Midway through the bleak year of 1945—a month after the capitulation of Germany—a shabby but proud old theatre in London shook off its wartime dust and came back to life in no uncertain terms. Sadler's Wells Theatre on Rosebery Avenue had been for years one of London's chief homes of opera and ballet. During the war it had done its patriotic duty by serving as a refugee shelter; its artistic re-birth was celebrated with the world première of Benjamin Britten's Peter Grimes.

Some of the biggest names in English opera took part in the performance—Joan Cross and Peter Pears led a distinguished cast under the direction of Eric Crozier and the baton of Reginald Goodall. Fine performances notwithstanding, that June evening opened a glowing and formidable chapter in the history of Twentieth Century opera.

In a land not particularly noted for indigenous operatic composition, it was immediately apparent that this new work sprang from the hand of a winner: assured technical skill supported a distinctive melodic gift; varied and original orchestration bespoke an ear for dramatic effect; a happy and natural wedding of text and vocal line indicated a love and respect for the voice and a rare skill in writing for it—characteristics all of a first-rate artist and craftsman of the lyric theatre.

After this enormous success, Britten turned at once to a different style of opera. More intimate subjects and smaller performing forces undoubtedly suited his desire to tour with the newly-founded English Opera Group.

Albert Herring represents such a work and may be the most immediately accessible of these 'chamber operas'. The composer's trademarks are still very much in evidence: the solo instruments assume distinct personalities; the vocal line demands but remains grateful; the musical fabric always illuminates the dramatic situation. An extra bonus in this score is evidence of a sharp, almost wicked, wit. After the grand, high-flown utterances of Lady Billows, Miss Wordsworth's endless chirping is a relief. The 'Tristan' quotation makes its point in a way that defies misunderstanding.

Benjamin Britten has left us treasures. The enormous variety of his operas and the unique characteristics of each reveal a mind fully conversant with the operatic stage—its possibilities, needs and effects; above all, no matter how complicated or sophisticated the musical vocabulary, a mind that never abandons that much-abused birthright of opera—the supremacy of the human voice.

James Craig

ORCHESTRA

VIOLIN I
George Willms*

VIOLIN II
Gisèle Dalbec

VIOLA
Pamela Inkman†

VIOLONCELLO
Myles Jordan

DOUBLE BASS
Luc Michaud

FLUTE, PICCOLO, ALTO FLUTE
Eileen Fawcett

OBOE
Shelley Heron

CLARINET, BASS CLARINET
Jill LaForty

BASSOON
Elizabeth Brickenden

HORN
Ron George

PERCUSSION
Don Philip

HARP
Sarah Davidson

PIANO
George Brough

* Leader
† Orchestra Manager

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NEXT OPERA PRODUCTION:

Don Giovanni (Mozart), March 3, 4, 6, 7, 1978: 8:00 p.m. MacMillan Theatre. Conductor, James Craig; Director, Leonard Treash; Scenic Designer, William Chesney; Costume Designer, Maxine Graham. Box office opens February 13, 1978.

NEXT EVENTS:

Orford String Quartet Beethoven Series, December 4, 1977, 3:00 p.m. Walter Hall.

Sunday Scholarship Series, Music from France, January 8, 1978, 3:00 p.m. Walter Hall.

OPERA DEPARTMENT
Chairman, Ezra Schabas

MUSIC STAFF

Music Director
Coaches

James Craig
Derek Bampton
Derek Bate

George Brough
Michael Evans

STAGE DIRECTORS

Michael Albano
Constance Fisher

Leonard Treash

PRODUCTION STAFF

Technical Director
Stage Manager
Assistant Technical Director
Assistant Stage Manager
Head of Carpentry
Assisted by

Ronald Kresky
Suzanne Maynard*
Adam P. Stewart
Deborah Osborne*
K. Reed Needles
Graham Likeness, Ray
Engelhardt***, Jim
Livingstone, Tim Flawn**,
David Pearsons**
Barbara Barron
Melanie Brennan
Marlene De Genova
Susie Bryson
Diane Mitchell
Kris Boon***, Bob Rodgers**
Barbara Hobbs
Bill Chesney
Gerda Kresky, Jan Dawson
Jack Medhurst
Louis of Rosedale
Jan Venus**, Brad Bedford

Head of Props
Assisted by
Wardrobe Cutter
Costume Supervisor
Seamstress
Assisted by
Millinery
Scenic Artist
Assisted by
Make-up Supervisor
Hairdressing and Wigs
Electrics

- * By Permission of Canadian Actors' Equity Association
** Technical and Production students of Ryerson Theatre Department
*** Students from Sheridan College, Theatre program

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

Administrator
Music Co-Ordinator
Librarian
Box Office
House Manager

Lynn Slotkin
Michael Albano
Susan Lauher
Eleanor Liebman
Charlotte Teeple

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